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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9237

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001610

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TAGS: PGOV PREL CG

SUBJECT: HOW JOSEPH KABILA BECAME PRESIDENT; CONVERSATIONS WITH A "KING MAKER"

REF: A. KINSHASA 1594

1B. KINSHASA 1253

CLASSIFIED BY POLOFF JONATHAN PRATT FOR REASONS 1.5 (B/D)

SUMMARY

11. (S) WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THAT LAURENT KABILA'S GUNSHOT WOUNDS WERE FATAL, CHIEF OF STAFF GEORGES BUSE AND DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF JEAN MBUYU, IN CONSULTATION WITH SEVERAL OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CABINET, MET TO DECIDE ON A SUCCESSOR. THEY SETTLED ON HIS SON JOSEPH AS THE ONLY PERSON WHO COULD HOLD TOGETHER VARIOUS GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY FACTIONS. THE TASK OF SELLING THEIR CHOICE TO OTHER POWER BROKERS WAS NOT EASY. OLD GUARD HARD-LINERS KAKUDJI, MWENZE, AND YERODIA RESISTED. KAKUDJI REPORTEDLY WANTED TO BE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. MILITARY COMMANDERS ALSO HAD TO BE CONVINCED, BUT THIS WASN'T AS DIFFICULT SINCE JOSEPH WAS WELL KNOWN AND GENERALLY RESPECTED WITHIN THE MILITARY. AN UNEXPECTED OBSTACLE WAS JOSEPH'S INITIAL RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT THE OFFER. ONCE THIS WAS OVERCOME, BUSE AND MBUYU PRESENTED JOSEPH KABILA TO THE REST OF THE GOVERNMENT AS THE NEW PRESIDENT.

12. (C) BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR JEAN MBUYU IS INCLUDED IN THIS CABLE. BIO DATA FOR OTHER KEY PLAYERS IN JOSEPH KABILA'S GOVERNMENT WILL FOLLOW SEPTEL ONCE THE NEW CABINET IS SELECTED (ANNOUNCEMENT IS REPORTED TO BE IMMINENT.)

CHOOSING A SUCCESSOR

13. (S) A HIGHLY RELIABLE EMBASSY CONTACT RELATED TO POLOFF MARCH 25 A RECENT CONVERSATION HE HAD WITH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR JEAN MBUYU. MBUYU, CURRENTLY SERVING AS JOSEPH KABILA'S SPECIAL ADVISOR FOR SECURITY, WAS LAURENT KABILA'S DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF WHEN THE PRESIDENT WAS ASSASSINATED. ACCORDING TO MBUYU, HE AND CHIEF OF STAFF GEORGES BUSE WERE THE PRIMARY PLAYERS IN SELECTING LAURENT KABILA'S SUCCESSOR.

14. (S) MBUYU TOLD CONTACT THAT IT WAS CLEAR WITHIN HOURS AFTER HE HAD BEEN SHOT THAT LAURENT KABILA WAS NOT GOING TO SURVIVE. MBUYU SAID THAT HE AND CHIEF OF STAFF GEORGES BUSE, IN CONSULTATION WITH SEVERAL OTHER UNSPECIFIED MEMBERS OF LAURENT KABILA'S PRESIDENTIAL CABINET, SAT DOWN THE EVENING OF JANUARY 16 TO DECIDE ON A SUCCESSOR. JOSEPH WAS THEIR IMMEDIATE AND OBVIOUS CHOICE. IN THEIR VIEW, HE WAS THE ONLY PERSON WHO COULD UNIFY THE VARIOUS FACTIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND COMMAND THE RESPECT OF THE MILITARY.

15. (S) BUSE AND MBUYU WERE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT MAINTAINING THE LOYALTY OF THE VARIOUS MILITARY FACTIONS, SINCE THE FAC HAD BEEN PIECED TOGETHER FROM UNITS THAT WERE RECRUITED AND TRAINED IN DIFFERENT REGIONS. MOST WERE RECRUITED IN KATANGA AND THE KIVUS; SOME HAD BEEN TRAINED IN ANGOLA AND ZIMBABWE. BUSE AND MBUYU BELIEVED THAT JOSEPH WAS THE ONLY FIGURE WHO WOULD BE PERCEIVED TO HAVE LEGITIMACY IN THE EYES OF THE DIVERSE MILITARY COALITIONS. HE HAD VISITED ALL OF THE CAMPS DURING HIS TENURE AS COMMANDER OF GROUND FORCES, AND HAD MARCHED ACROSS THE COUNTRY WITH THEM IN 1996-97. IN THEIR VIEW, KABILA WAS WELL REGARDED BY THE ARMED FORCES.

¶6. (S) MBUYU SAID THAT HE AND BUSE INSTRUCTED MILITARY AIDE DE CAMP EDDY KAPEND TO GO ON TELEVISION THE NIGHT OF JANUARY 16TH TO APPEAL FOR CALM AND ORDER. AS A MEMBER OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CABINET, KAPEND WAS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE MILITARY OFFICER. PERHAPS MORE CRUCIAL, BUSE AND MBUYU JUDGED THAT KAPEND HAD THE SUPPORT OF GENERAL YAV NAWEJ, WHO DESPITE HIS ARREST "REMAINS A POWERFUL MILITARY FIGURE, RESPECTED AND FEARED BY THE FAC IN KINSHASA."

MAKING THE HARD SELL

¶7. (S) BUSE AND MBUYU WERE REPORTEDLY CONVINCED THEY WOULD HAVE A HARD TIME PERSUADING HARD-LINERS KAKUDJI, MWENZE, AND YERODIA TO ACCEPT JOSEPH. INTERIOR MINISTER KAKUDJI PROVED TO BE THE TOUGHEST SELL, AS HE HIMSELF HAD PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS. MBUYU DID NOT INDICATE WHAT DEALS MIGHT HAVE BEEN STRUCK TO OBTAIN KAKUDJI'S APPROVAL, BUT DID SAY THAT AFTER MUCH ARM TWISTING AND INTERNAL "SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY" KAKUDJI EVENTUALLY RELENTED. JUSTICE MINISTER MWENZE KONGOLO AND ABDOULAYE YERODIA (FORMERLY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NOW MINISTER OF EDUCATION) WERE RESISTANT AT FIRST BUT GAVE IN MORE EASILY THAN KAKUDJI.

¶8. (S) MBUYU SAID THAT HE AND BUSE NEXT APPROACHED THE KEY MILITARY COMMANDERS (CONTACT REPORTED MBUYU SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED GENERAL LWETCHA) TO GET THEIR APPROVAL. THIS WASN'T A PROBLEM, ACCORDING TO MBUYU, SINCE JOSEPH IS WELL REGARDED IN THE MILITARY, AND THE COMMANDERS WERE PLEASED THAT SOMEONE WITH AN ARMY BACKGROUND WOULD ASSUME CONTROL.

¶9. (S) THE FINAL HURDLE WAS CONVINCING JOSEPH HIMSELF OF THE PLAN. THIS PROVED TO BE MORE DIFFICULT THAN EXPECTED AS JOSEPH WAS INITIALLY "VERY RESISTANT" TO THE IDEA. MBUYU DID NOT CONVEY JOSEPH'S REASONS FOR BALKING AT THE PROPOSAL (JOSEPH MAY NOT HAVE PROVIDED AN EXPLANATION) BUT MBUYU SPECULATED THAT PERSONAL SECURITY WAS PROBABLY CHIEF AMONG HIS CONCERNS.

¶10. (S) ONCE THEY HAD SECURED JOSEPH'S AGREEMENT, BUSE AND MBUYU CONVOKED ALL GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND PRESENTED JOSEPH KABILA AS THE SUCCESSOR TO HIS FATHER. "HERE IS YOUR NEW PRESIDENT," IS HOW MBUYU DESCRIBED THE ANNOUNCEMENT. "THERE WAS LITTLE DISCUSSION," REPORTED MBUYU. THE TWENTY THREE OTHER MINISTERS LOOKED TO KAKUDJI, MWENZE, AND YERODIA TO GAUGE WHETHER OR NOT JOSEPH HAD THEIR SUPPORT. "THE DEAL WAS SEALED" WHEN THESE THREE KEY FIGURES EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT (OR AT LEAST DIDN'T EXPRESS OPPOSITION). ACCORDING TO MBUYU, ALL THAT REMAINED WERE THE "DETAILS" OF ANNOUNCING THE SUCCESSION AND FIGURING OUT UNDER WHAT LEGAL AUTHORITY JOSEPH COULD BE NAMED PRESIDENT.

BIO INFORMATION: JEAN MBUYU

¶11. (C) SAID TO BE IN HIS MID-FORTIES, "MBUYU" IS A MULUBA FROM NORTH KATANGA (OTHERWISE KNOWN AS A "MULUBAKAT.") HIS MOTHER IS RUMORED TO BE RWANDAN, A CLAIM THAT HAS ALSO BEEN MADE OF JOSEPH KABILA. MBUYU ATTENDED LAW SCHOOL AND PRACTICED LAW IN LUBUMBASHI, EVENTUALLY BECOMING HEAD OF THE LUBUMBASHI BAR ASSOCIATION IN 1991. MBUYU CREATED A HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION IN LUBUMBASHI CALLED "THE COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS" (CDH), WHICH STILL EXISTS TODAY. MBUYU GAINED A MEASURE OF PROMINENCE IN 1990 WHEN HE WAS JAILED FOR DENOUNCING THE STUDENT MASSACRE OF MAY 12, 1990 IN LUBUMBASHI. JESUIT MISSIONARIES PRESSURED THE GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE HIM. MBUYU PARTICIPATED IN THE NATIONAL SOVEREIGN CONFERENCE OF 1991-2 AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF KATANGAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND BECAME A MEMBER OF THE TRANSITIONAL PARLIAMENT UNDER MOBUTU. MBUYU WAS AN EMBASSY IV PARTICIPANT IN 1991 AND LATER A "FELLOW" AT THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW GROUP IN WASHINGTON, DC FROM 1994-96. MBUYU SUBSEQUENTLY ATTENDED THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME LAW SCHOOL AND RECEIVED HIS L.L.M. IN 1997. HIS WIFE, A NURSE, REPORTEDLY STILL LIVES IN INDIANA. PROBABLY DUE IN PART TO FAMILY TIES (MBUYU

IS SAID TO BE LAURENT KABILA'S COUSIN), KABILA CHOSE MBUYU TO BE HIS LEGAL ADVISOR. KABILA THEN PROMOTED MBUYU TO DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S ASSASSINATION, MBUYU CONTINUED TO SERVE AS POLITICAL ADVISOR TO JOSEPH KABILA AND ALSO ACTED AS HIS LIAISON WITH THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION (REF A). JOSEPH KABILA APPOINTED MBUYU SPECIAL ADVISOR FOR SECURITY ON MARCH 8. MBUYU SPEAKS ENGLISH BUT PREFERS FRENCH.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) THE REPLACEMENT OF CHIEF OF STAFF GEORGES BUSE WITH THEOPHILE MBEMBA (THE FORMER GOVERNOR OF KINSHASA) LEAVES JEAN MBUYU AS THE ONLY "KING MAKER" IN JOSEPH'S GOVERNMENT. THIS APPEARS TO AFFORD HIM CONSIDERABLE CLOUT IN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. THAT SEVERAL OF MBUYU'S CLOSE COLLEAGUES WERE TAPPED TO OTHER POSITIONS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CABINET (REF B), AND THAT JOSEPH HAS RELIED ON MBUYU FOR SEVERAL KEY TASKS (SUCH AS LIAISON WITH THE OPPOSITION) APPEAR TO CONFIRM HIS GROWING INFLUENCE.

¶13. (C) IF THE SCENARIO DESCRIBED ABOVE IS ACCURATE, IT IS SURPRISING THAT MBUYU HIMSELF WAS NOT CHOSEN TO BE CHIEF OF STAFF. JOSEPH MAY PREFER TO RELY ON MBUYU AS A TRUSTED ADVISOR RATHER THAN PLACING HIM DIRECTLY IN CHARGE OF HIS STAFF. OR, CONSCIOUS OF MBUYU'S KEY ROLE IN HIS OWN SELECTION, JOSEPH MAY BE LEERY OF GIVING HIM TOO MUCH POWER.

SWING